



Civic Education in the Academy

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Abstract

The author presents the need for a renewed commitment to civic education in higher education in the United States. While many have identified and touted the need for civics in public schools, the author focuses on what can be done in higher education to promote the cause of democracy in a nonpartisan manner. The need to be more proactive in the dissemination of civic education, not only for children but adults as well, was quite evident during the 2020 presidential election and beyond. With a great deal of political polarization at the present time, it is essential that higher education play a key role in the maintenance of democracy in the United States. Democratic institutions need to be preserved and education is still the optimum way to promote diversity, civility, and empathy for fellow citizens. Not much has changed in this regard since the ideology of the common school movement of the nineteenth century. The challenge, however, is to promote civics in a society that has recently experienced an attempt to overthrow the results of a democratic election as well as the repudiation of science during an ongoing global pandemic.

Keywords: Civic education, democracy, education reform, political science, citizenship.

Introduction

Political scientist Charles Merriam expressed optimism when it came to civic education during the Hoover era in the early twentieth century. He felt that during his time, citizens would become better equipped to participate in public affairs because their awareness and knowledge would be enhanced in the new modern era. Because of heightened levels of political awareness, citizens would be better equipped to address the plethora of policy challenges at all levels of government (Merriam, 1931). Yet almost a century later, we are still plagued with citizen disinterest and knowledge about the political system, far too much violence in our society, poverty, crime, and a general lack of tolerance toward one another, particularly when political opinions about the key issues of the day amongst the citizenry do not comport with one another.

Despite his hopeful view in the early 1930s of citizen awareness in the modern era, Merriam did later conclude that there was a serious deficiency in the civic education of young people in the United States (Merriam, 1947). Seventy-five years have passed since his declaration and nothing has really changed in the United States when it comes to the provision of a concrete, tangible civic education across all 50 states

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and the District of Columbia ([University of Pennsylvania, 2021](#); [Fife, 2021](#); [Winthrop, 2020](#); [Center for American Progress, 2019](#); [Korbey, 2019](#); [Niemi & Junn, 1998](#)). Dewey identified the causal link between a government resting upon the will of the majority and the need for popular masses to be educated effectively ([Dewey, 2018](#)). While adult citizens have recently demonstrated an enhanced understanding of the Constitution, there is ample room for improvement. In addition, it is possible that citizens' knowledge of the Constitution increased during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and could regress in subsequent surveys ([University of Pennsylvania, 2021](#)). To be sure, a diverse array of scholars concurs in the need and plausibility for providing civic education for society and this broad consensus has been in existence for generations ([Woodson, 1933](#); [DuBois, 1973](#); [Franquiz & Salinas, 2013](#); [King, 2020](#); [Duncan, 2020](#)).

Civic Education in the United States

Civic education is a broad and encompassing term, as illustrated in the following conception:

...”civic education” means all the processes that affect people’s beliefs, commitments, capabilities, and actions as members or prospective members of communities. Civic education need not be intentional or deliberate; institutions and communities transmit values and norms without meaning to. It may not be beneficial: sometimes people are civically educated in ways that disempower them or impart harmful values and goals. It is certainly not limited to schooling and the education of children and youth. Families, governments, religions, and mass media are just some of the institutions involved in civic education, understood as a lifelong process” ([Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2021](#)).

While it is true that civic education does not need to be formal in nature, informal approaches to imparting basic knowledge about American politics, American history, and public affairs are not effective, as indicated by numerous measures (e.g., citizen knowledge about the Constitution, current leaders, and the complexity of public policy challenges). Formal approaches to providing civic education are lacking as well, as evidenced by a recent study comparing state approaches to providing civic education ([Center for American Progress, 2019](#)).

As witnessed on January 6, 2021, the democratic experiment in the United States, dating back to 1789, cannot be assumed as a given ([Craig & Loehwing, 2021](#); [Mora, 2021](#)). A large mob, manipulated by the president of the United States, attempted to overturn a free election so that Donald Trump could remain in power through violent means. In other nations, the word “coup” would describe such an event. In this country, many Trump supporters believed in a fabricated lie commonly known as “stop the steal.” The mobsters somehow perceived themselves to be patriots, correcting a grievous wrong promoted by elites on the left. In reality, candidates can contest free elections through judicial review. Trump’s attempts to change the election results in key states such as Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, Arizona, Georgia, and Nevada were not successful. His lawyers failed to convince both state and federal judges that fraudulent voting occurred in 2020. Quite the contrary, many election experts in the United States determined that 2020 was the least error prone in American history ([Brennan Center for Justice at NYU Law, 2020](#)).

The framers of the Constitution certainly understood the delicate nature of democracy as the first experiment failed miserably under the Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union. When the architects of this republic drafted the Constitution during the Philadelphia Convention in 1787, they could not have known its fate. By the following year, however, the Constitution was ratified by conventions in nine states, which was required under Article VII (it was eventually ratified by all 13 states). A few leading colonial Americans signed the Articles, such as Roger Sherman, John Hancock, Samuel Adams, Elbridge Gerry, Gouverneur Morris, and Robert Morris. Sherman, an architect of the Great Compromise, is the only person to have signed the Articles of Association (1774), Declaration of Independence (1776), Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union (1781), and Constitution (1787). Even gaining independence from a

great foreign power could not ensure the viability of democracy. Culturally and otherwise, the optimum way to safeguard democracy in the American republic is through the education process. Historically, providing citizens with a tangible civic education has proven to be quite elusive.

Historical and Contemporary Calls for Civic Education

In the late nineteenth century, a future president of the United States gave a speech in Buffalo, New York. What he said on January 26, 1883, is still of significant importance today, almost 150 years later. According to Theodore Roosevelt, all adults must participate in the political life of a community ([Roosevelt, January 26, 1883](#)). Without the full participation of the people, democracy is limited, for all members of society must have input in public policy for the diverse viewpoints of the people to somehow be enacted into public policy. I concur with a point that Roosevelt made during that speech in that even in the twenty-first century, it is easier for people of means to consume politics than those who are living in poverty. Simply put, the opportunity cost for less affluent people is higher than their counterparts in the upper and middle classes. However, to the maximum extent possible, all adults must embrace their roles as citizens in a democratic republic. Without a diverse array of viewpoints, public policy will always reflect the wishes of the wealthy and powerful, which is antithetical to the premise that all citizens should be afforded the opportunity to share their views on a policy debate, regardless of their income and education levels.

Merriam (1947) delineated guiding considerations in civic education. His prophecy is still of vital importance to contemporaries today. He contended that democracy is a historic work in progress. As it is a human enterprise, democracy is imperfect, but worthwhile. Conflict is omnipresent in democracies as citizens are free to share their differences of opinion. His conclusion in the immediate aftermath of World War II is still profound today. There are many indicators that the American democracy remains imperfect (e.g., violence in American society; poverty; and inequality). The storming of the U.S. Capital in early 2021 is a haunting reminder of something Merriam said almost four generations ago: “The temptation to abandon democracy for what seem the short cuts of dictatorship, of the few or of the many, is strong at times...” ([Merriam, 1947, p. 263](#)). The willingness of some Americans to subvert democracy in favor of violence to achieve their objectives was evident to the world on television two weeks before the inauguration of Joe Biden as the new president of the United States.

The lack of citizen knowledge about the American democracy is shocking. When the official tallies were conducted in all the states and the District of Columbia, it was announced that Biden defeated Trump in the Electoral College, 306-232, and by 81.3 million to 74.2 million in the popular vote. Trump became the first president since George H.W. Bush in 1992 to lose his bid for reelection. In addition, Biden won the largest percentage of the popular vote of any challenger since Franklin Roosevelt defeated Herbert Hoover in 1932 ([270towin.com, 2022b](#)). In spite of the work of local and state officials across the nation, and federal and state judges in a plethora of court cases filed by Trump, even after the election was determined and Biden had been inaugurated, a significant portion of the electorate still believed in the lie manufactured by Trump—“stop the steal.” In May of 2021, a majority of Republicans (53 percent) believed that Trump won the election and blamed his electoral defeat on illegal voting ([Reuters 2021](#)). In June of 2021, 30 percent of Republicans believed that Trump would be reinstated as president later in the year, something that cannot happen under the federal Constitution ([The Hill, 2021](#)).

There have been many dissatisfied citizens in U.S. electoral history. Yet the first peaceful transfer of power, which occurred in the House of Representatives chamber in Congress Hall in Philadelphia on March 4, 1797, was done without incident. George Washington shocked those in attendance by sitting with citizens as he watched John Adams receive the oath as his successor. There have been close and controversial presidential elections in U.S. history (e.g., 1800 (Thomas Jefferson and Adams); 1824 (John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson); 1876 (Rutherford B. Hayes and Samuel Tilden); 1888 (Benjamin Harrison and Grover Cleveland); 2000 (George W. Bush and Al Gore); and 2016 (Trump and Hillary Clinton). Yet

political power was transferred from one person to another from a rival political party in a peaceful manner. This was clearly not the case in 2020.

Trump initially proclaimed his desire to reject the election outcome if he lost in the 2016 presidential election, when he suggested that the election was “rigged” against him in the third presidential debate (Bowden and Teague, 2022; NBC News 2016). Despite losing the popular vote to Clinton (65.8 million to 62.9 million), winning close races in Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin resulted in Trump winning the Electoral College over Clinton, 304-227 (5 electors pledged to Clinton and 2 to Trump did not support their candidates, a rare occurrence in electoral history) (270towin.com, 2022a). Allegations of a “rigged” election reverted to Trumpian claims of a landslide victory. In 2020, however, Trump’s approach to contesting the election differed greatly, for the simple fact that he lost, in both the Electoral College, which of course is the only election for president that really matters in the United States, and the popular tally.

The “stop the steal” contention made by Trump and his surrogates began in 2016. Roger Stone, a Trump advisor, and long-time associate, launched a website with that name in 2016, soliciting \$10,000 donations so that the Democrats would not steal the election (*The Mercury News*, 2020; CNN, 2020; BBC, 2020). It appears that the implementation of the massive disinformation claim made by Trump in 2016 occurred in 2020 and 2021. In the waning weeks of his presidency, Trump issued a pardon to Stone. At the time, Stone was the subject of a Federal Bureau of Investigation for possible ties between Moscow and the 2016 Trump campaign (NPR, 2020).

These recent events in the world’s oldest democracy reinforce the reality that democracy is a fledgling entity that requires due diligence by the citizenry to perpetuate and hopefully flourish. At this crucial time in human evolution, where climate change is an existential threat, and a plethora of public policy challenges exist across the globe, America has elected officials and their supporters who are guilty of espousing conspiracy theories without any factual basis. In addition, Trump and his supporters routinely eschew science when it does not mesh with their policy agenda. The only common behavioral trait is that Trump and his allies have regularly engaged in the politics of deceit and distortion to achieve their public policy objectives.

In so doing, Trump and his political allies have denigrated the trust of citizens in government through a systematic attempt to undermine the media and several other institutions in this country (Pew Research Center, 2021; Aitalieva & Park, 2019). The damage is likely to take a considerable amount of time and effort to overcome.

While practitioners (O’Connor & Hamilton, 2008) and scholars (Merriam, 1931, 1934, 1947) alike concur that public education is central to the dissemination of civic education to school children, there is a role for scholars and practitioners in higher education as well when it comes to civic education. Ultimately, facts do matter in our political and civil discourse, and citizens need to be vigilant about attempts to manipulate them through deception and lies (Hochschild & Einstein, 2015; Correa & Hall, 2021). Merriam (1947, p. 264) advocated a “100 percent democracy or none.” Most Americans embrace this lofty ideal, but democracy cannot perpetuate without prioritizing it as a worthwhile ongoing endeavor worthy of preserving. The maintenance of democracy entails the sustenance of generational norms and democratic institutions (Setzler & Yanus, 2021).

Engaging Students in the Classroom in Civic Education

Fife (2021) presented a guide for all citizens predicated on a simple, but critical message. All citizens must be more proactive and knowledgeable about politics, public policy, and the state of public affairs to have a more perfect union. Americans cannot expect for government leaders to solve all the quandaries and

perplexing problems of the day; citizens are an important part of any solution of today’s public policy challenges. Fife’s (2021) guide is based on the following theoretical contention:

Supporters of Democracy → Knowledge → Citizen Action

Most Americans believe that the ultimate sovereigns in the United States, or rulers, are the people who consent to be governed by popularly elected leaders every two years in federal elections (Fife, 2021, pp. 1-2). There are several substantive topics in which Americans can enhance their substantive knowledge, gain greater historical context and appreciation, and be better positioned to understand the societal implications of public policy choices as opposed to simply focusing on the politics of individualism.

Included in Table 1 is a list of topics that were combined for the purpose of Fife’s (2021) citizen’s guide. The consolidation of topics was both thematic and designed to help the student and citizen understand the material in a more intuitive manner.

Table 1.
Civic Education Learning Topics in the Academy

Combined topics	Examples of key terms and citizen homework exercises
Constitution and Federalism	Philadelphia Convention; Federalist Papers; checks and balances; separation of powers; democracy; Bill of Rights; federalism; states’ rights; necessary and proper clause; dual federalism; cooperative federalism; fiscal federalism; categorical grants; block grants Read the Declaration of Independence: https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration Read the U.S. Constitution: https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution
Civil Liberties and Civil Rights	Civil liberties; civil rights; due process clause; equal protection clause; Reconstruction; Compromise of 1877; Jim Crow; selective incorporation; right to privacy; Civil Rights Act of 1964; Voting Rights Act of 1965 Read about the history of the right to privacy: http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/conlaw/rightofprivacy.html Watch a video about the right to bear arms: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDv1qFBjH1o
Voting and Elections	Suffrage; literacy tests; poll taxes; grandfather clause; white primary; open primary; closed primary; King Caucus; nominating conventions; Electoral College; gender gap; incumbents; name recognition; voter turnout Read about the Seneca Falls Convention: http://www.history.com/topics/seneca-falls-convention Read about all the presidential elections in U.S. history and visualize the Electoral College map: https://www.270towin.com
Mass Media, Interest Groups, and Public Opinion	Mass media; interest groups; public opinion; lobbying; pluralist democracy; random sample; horse race journalism; leaking; equal time provision; political action committees; political socialization; conservatives; liberals Watch President Franklin Roosevelt’s first fireside chat at: https://www.c-span.org/video/?298210-1/president-franklin-roosevelts-fireside-chat Watch the first presidential debate between Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy on September 26, 1960: https://jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/TNC-172.aspx

Table 1 (Continued)

<p>Congress and Political Parties</p>	<p>Political parties; Democratic Party; Republican Party; enumerated powers; implied powers; standing committees; subcommittees; filibuster; conference committee; pocket veto Information about the U.S. House of Representatives is available at: https://www.house.gov Information about the U.S. Senate is available at: https://www.senate.gov Watch a video about how a bill becomes a law at: http://www.annenbergclassroom.org/page/the-legislative-process-how-a-bill-becomes-a-federal-law</p>
<p>Presidency and Executive Bureaucracy</p>	<p>Whig theory; stewardship theory; power to persuade; bureaucracy; cabinet; regulations; rule making; spoils system; civil service system; presidential approval; executive orders; executive agreements; signing statement; going public; executive privilege; fire alarm oversight; police patrol oversight Read how presidential historians rank all the presidents in U.S. history: https://www.c-span.org/presidentsurvey2021/?page=overall Basic information about the federal bureaucracy can be obtained at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I8EQAnKntLs</p>
<p>Supreme Court and Federal Judiciary</p>	<p>Standing; appellate jurisdiction; original jurisdiction; writ of certiorari; oral arguments; judicial review; district courts; circuit courts of appeal; judicial philosophy; living Constitution; original intent; precedents Information about the U.S. Supreme Court can be obtained at: https://www.supremecourt.gov/ Information about the state and federal courts can be found at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGyx5UEwgtA</p>
<p>Social, Economic, and Foreign Policy</p>	<p>Public policy; social policy; economic policy; foreign policy; Great Depression; New Deal; Social Security; entitlements; Great Society; Medicare; Medicaid; federal poverty level; fiscal policy; Keynesian economics; supply-side economics; deregulation; isolationism; containment; Cold War; federal budget; budget deficit; national debt; fiscal year; mandatory spending; discretionary spending; climate change; privatization; regressive tax; progressive tax; internationalism; globalization Information on the national debt can be obtained at: https://treasurydirect.gov/govt/reports/pd/debttothepenny.htm The current federal poverty level for families in America is available at: https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines</p>

Source: Fife, B. (2021). *Citizenship in the American Republic*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Regardless of how information is presented to students, they must gain an appreciation for several important fundamental truisms. First, democracy cannot be taken for granted. We live in a period where a considerable number of American adults embrace conspiracy theories as factual and disregard scientific information with reckless abandon. Second, politics affects everything in American life. Avoiding it and pretending that it will go away is dangerous business. The elected leaders and the president are responsible for regulating all facets of the American economy and society, and citizens must equip themselves with knowledge to do their jobs in a republic in a more responsible and effective manner. Third, politics should ultimately be all about ideas, not polls, money, and sound bites. As citizens, we must expect our leaders to offer substantive ideas about how to address the vexing challenges that exist in contemporary society. A lack of ideas simply will not be sufficient with the plethora of issues that exist at the present time. Fourth, citizens must understand that politics always entails conflict because there are always winners and losers associated with making public policies. It is important that all diverse voices be heard in a pluralist democracy, and not simply the rich and politically powerful. In this manner, public policy has a much better chance to be

reflective of the tremendous diversity that exists in the United States in the early part of the twenty-first century.

Envisioning Civic Education in the 2020s and Beyond in the Academy

Many scholars have emphasized the connections between democracy and education (Mann, 1891; Cremin, 1957; Archambault, 1964; Groen, 2008; Johnston, 2009; Fife, 2013; Stützlein, 2014; Fife, 2016; Pring, 2016; Dewey, 2018). These interdisciplinary analysts were largely focused on K-12 students, however. The debate about promoting civic education in K-12 will presumably ensue. There are some intriguing ideas already (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2011; Fife, 2013). The blueprint for civic education reform already exists. It is now incumbent upon the political leaders in the world's oldest democracy to ensure that the second experiment in democracy launched by James Madison, George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and others does not succumb to violence and tyranny. The way to do this is to equip children with the requisite knowledge needed for them to do their jobs as citizens as they evolve into adults. Educating children about the American democracy is an important part of the education and political socialization process.

Another key point about civic education needs to be established. Generation after generation has passed in the United States, and there is still an ongoing conflict regarding federalism. Many have perceived K-12 public education as a states' rights issue, where federal officials play a minimal role in education policy, particularly in the financing of education across the nation. This constant conflict between and among educators within the same country has not served children well. I cannot help but think, with proper leadership and resolve, talented educators at the federal, state, and local levels of government could manage to create a comprehensive civic education program to implement *en masse*. The civic education process does not have to end after completing a high school diploma. City and town officials across the country, working in concert with educators in community colleges, colleges, and universities, could regularly provide workshops designed to enhance citizen knowledge about their own form of governance.

Winthrop (2020) noted that civic education should be provided at all levels of the educational experience. This is an excellent idea. Civic education must be offered in elementary, middle, and senior high schools. Education experts across the country can determine what may be age appropriate by way of content. But as referenced earlier, we must never forget that the learning process does not stop when the pursuit of formal education ceases. There is a role for local communities, as well as colleges and universities, with providing ongoing civics lessons for citizens (Mabrey III, Boston-Hill, Stelljes, & Boersma, 2021).

The Pivotal Role for Higher Education in Civic Education

Much can be learned from history, something that Oliver Wendell Holmes lectured future attorneys about in the late nineteenth century (Holmes, Jr., 1897). The American Political Science Association was founded in 1903 and is the oldest organization in the discipline in the country. Its first publication of record was the *Proceedings of the American Political Science Association*, which lasted from 1903-1914. In one of the early volumes of this journal, a political science professor had much to offer about civic education in the academy.

William A. Schaper (1869-1955) was a political scientist at the University of Minnesota from 1901-1917 (Minnesota Historical Society, 2022). He wrote an article on the preparedness of secondary students for college in 1905. At that time, secondary students in Minnesota had one fundamental requirement before entering higher education: a command of the English language. Schaper concluded that two other requirements should be added: proficiency in both American government and American history (Schaper, 1905). His idea has merit in the academy in the twenty-first century.

Schaper was dismissed by the board of regents of the University of Minnesota in 1917 on the grounds that he was “a rabid pro-German” ([American Association of University Professors, 1938, p. 222](#)). After being out of the academy for eight years, he was subsequently hired at the University of Oklahoma in 1925 ([Matsen, 1988, p. 137](#)). In 1938, Schaper was reinstated as professor emeritus at the University of Minnesota and his salary was paid for the 1917-18 academic year, the year he was terminated. Sections of the resolution dealing with academic freedom that were approved by the board of regents in 1938 would later become incorporated in the University of Minnesota’s document for tenure in 1945 ([Matsen, 1988, p. 137](#)). Though his contributions to the academy may not be well known today, his ideas have withstood the passage of generations of time.

I do not in any way presume rewriting the general education curricula for colleges and universities across the country. However, albeit in a different context and time, Schaper’s premise a long time ago can be implemented in a proactive manner to those institutions of higher education whose faculty and executive leaders choose to do so. Requiring a course in American government and history for all undergraduates is a reasonable contribution that higher education can make toward the civic education of the citizens of the United States. Americans know so little about politics, public affairs, and the history of their own nation. This knowledge for all graduates in colleges and universities in the United States would be tantamount to a collective message from scholars and higher education leaders that civic education is important and that all college and university graduates will be contributing citizens of a democratic republic for their entire lives. Accordingly, they should be expected to have a fundamental knowledge base of their own government and history regardless of their major. What they choose to do with it is up to them.

Reinforcing the tenets of democracy should not be construed as favoring one party or one cause over others. The way to combat authoritarian and violent trends is through education and imparting knowledge. A bachelor’s degree requires at least 120 credit hours across the country. Requiring students to take at least 6 credit hours (8 credit hours in some institutions with 4 credit courses) in basic American government and history is a small investment to promote the cause of democracy, now and well into the future. At some point, it is in the collective interest of the greater common good to ensure that all college graduates have a fundamental understanding of the American constitutional republic. Obviously, there is a pragmatic component to such a systemic change where the notion is embraced. More sections of introductory courses in American government and history necessitates more instructors and a greater institutional investment. Implementation of this proposal means that students may be taking different courses than might otherwise be the case. It will not detract from the value of a liberal arts education. Students should hopefully still pursue a broad and challenging curriculum at the baccalaureate level.

Battling Cynicism

An interested, curious adult citizenry is well equipped to hold leaders accountable for their actions in national politics. Corruption and incompetence need not be tolerated as acceptable. Yet at the present time, cynicism is rampant when it comes to public perceptions about the current state of politics and public affairs. Trust in government and public officials needs a renaissance. More idealism, and hope, are sorely needed in American society. Trust must be earned, and it must be based on substantive results, however. According to a recent Gallup Poll, trust and confidence in government remains low. Similar polls have yielded the same consistent results for years. The federal government was ranked last by the people in Gallup’s annual listing of 25 business and industry sectors. Half of Americans have a somewhat negative or very negative rating of the federal government. While Americans are slightly more trusting of the government’s ability to handle international policy issues, the public has little trust and confidence in the national government to sufficiently address domestic policy problems ([Gallup Poll, 2020](#)).

Consider the words of Merriam a long time ago: “The deadliest foe of governmental advance anywhere is cynicism, which ignorantly classes all government and governors as black, without any gray or white. The

strongest supporter of government is the discriminating citizen who understands what might be achieved under existing conditions, practically, and avoids the yes or no answer which is so common, especially among those who are educated and intelligent, but not politically. I am constantly dismayed by the dogmatic ignorance with which many presumably well-educated citizens pass judgment on governmental personalities and processes, on which they might readily enlighten themselves” (Merriam, 1934, p. 169). Pervasive cynicism will do little to advance the cause of enhancing civic education in the United States and concomitant robust public affairs debate. Furthermore, our own collective ignorance enhances the conditions of being successfully manipulated by officials who purport to be promoting the greater common good, but may, in fact, be undermining it for personal gain. Regardless on one’s political party affiliation, or perhaps indifference to politics altogether, Trump’s actions over the last few years regarding “electoral integrity” were self-serving and he actively sought to overturn the results of a presidential election in 2020 although he lost in both the Electoral College and the popular vote. The student of history will note, with fascination, that his actions have never occurred in the history of the American republic because they were treasonous and should have been identified as such. The reality that millions of Americans were willing to support, or at least acquiesce, to his fabrication is *prima facie* evidence of a democracy in need of reform.

The ongoing democratic experiment in the United States is worthy of preserving and making more effective in the years ahead. Consider the profound commentary of Giroux (2021, p. 9): “Education is central to politics because it provides the foundation for those of us who believe that democracy is a site of struggle, which can only be engaged through an awareness of both its fragility and necessity. As educators what we cannot do is look away, paralyzed by indifference, a deadly pessimism, or a death-dealing cynicism. Education performs a crucial, if not noble, task in society. It is a crucial bulwark of producing students as engaged and critical citizens while constructing a deeper and expansive understanding of democracy.” While Americans may be critical of partisan fighting, gridlock, and a host of other matters, it is the charge of contemporary members of the academy, faculty, and executive leaders alike, to embrace the ethos of democracy and not allow cynicism, or at least passivity, to dominate their approach to citizenship in a democratic republic. One way to ensure that the vision of our ancestors in the eighteenth century continues, is to equip our own graduates to be proactive participants in the American republic. Imparting knowledge, as Mann envisioned in the mid-nineteenth century, is the optimum approach to this existential objective. The role of the professional practitioner and scholar in this noble endeavor is paramount.

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Conflict of Interest

The author has no conflict of interest to report.

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